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U.S. rejects Soviet offer to exchange radar cuts

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A Soviet offer to stop work on a sophisticated radar in central Siberia in return for a U.S. halt to the upgrading of radar systems in Britain and Greenland is "inequitable" and "unacceptable," the State Department said yesterday.

State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said the Soviet offer also constitutes a possible admission that the facility, a phased radar array near Krasnoyarsk, violates the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, U.S. officials said yesterday.

"From the United States' point of view, it is a clear-cut violation" of the treaty, Mr. Kalb said.

The ABM treaty, signed by the United States and Soviet Union, prohibits building long-range, phased array radar, except at the periphery of both countries.

The reasoning behind this provision is that powerful radars in the interior could track incoming missiles and direct ground missiles to shoot them down. By so doing, they would neutralize a nation's ability to retaliate and thus weaken deterrence.

The improvements to the U.S. stations in Thule, Greenland, and at Fylingdales in Yorkshire, England, do not violate the treaty because they were built before the pact was signed, Mr. Kalb said.

Thule, Fylingdales and another radar station in Alaska are the principal components of the U.S. early-warning system against enemy missiles.

U.S. intelligence first detected construction of the Krasnoyarsk radar in 1983, and the radar is expected to become operational in 1988 to 1989, according to a 1984 report.

Soviet negotiators in Geneva, confronted by U.S. negotiators in July 1983, stated that the radar is designed for

tracking objects in space and not as an early warning for ballistic missiles, the report stated.

But the U.S. side said that Krasnoyarsk could not track space objects better than existing Soviet radars and is pointed toward the horizon where it could monitor incoming missiles, the report said.

Earlier this year, a Defense Intelligence Agency report estimated that the radar would have the technology to provide target tracking data as part of a potential nationwide ABM defense.

Mr. Kalb said the Soviet facility violated the treaty "by virtue of its inland site, orientation over more than 4,000 kilometers of Soviet territory and its capability for ballistic missile detection and tracking."

"The early warning radars at Thule and Fylingdales, on the other hand, were deployed prior to the signing of the ABM treaty. Their modernization is not prohibited by the treaty," he said.

"Any formulation that seeks to equate a Soviet activity that is prohibited under the ABM treaty with modernization action by the U.S. that is not prohibited would be inequitable and unacceptable precedent," he said.

The improvements to the Fylingdales station would double its radar sweep to 360 degrees and would cover the western Soviet Union, the Middle East, North Africa and the North Atlantic.

The improvements to the Thule station would sweep 240 degrees, covering a portion of the North Atlantic Ocean and extending coverage of Greenland.

Mr. Kalb declined to call the U.S. position a rejection of the proposal but said the Soviets are aware of the U.S. objection to the offer.

A Pentagon official said the Soviet offer is "clearly a trade of something legal for things that are illegal."